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ABSTRACT

This document begins by briefly outlining the problems of juveniles incarcerated in correctional institutions, including the problems of overcrowding and recidivism. It asserts that creative art therapy is designed to provide a therapeutic atmosphere for understanding and change and documents the use of creative art therapy techniques with incarcerated male juveniles. Specific creative art techniques which have been successfully used in counseling sessions with incarcerated male juveniles exhibiting typical problem behavior are discussed. The techniques presented were chosen because they are non-threatening, easily accepted and understood, do not require artistic talent, and are often fun. For each technique, a list of materials needed, why the technique is being used, and the procedure used are discussed. Creative art therapy techniques described include making collages, cartooning, family drawing, drawing the family doing something, making a family sociogram, creating a feelings inside and out drawing, anger release drawing, and past-present-future drawing. A discussion section focuses on factors that counselors must consider prior to using creative art therapy with incarcerated male juveniles. (NB)

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CREATIVE ART THERAPY FOR INCARCERATED MALE JUVENILES

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Abstract

Creative art therapy can provide a therapeutic atmosphere for understanding and change. This paper focuses on specific creative art techniques used successfully by the authors in counseling sessions with incarcerated male juveniles exhibiting typical problem behavior.

CREATIVE ART THERAPY FOR INCARCERATED MALE JUVENILES

The typical manifestation of problem behavior in incarcerated male juvenile offenders is generally unpredictable and frequently explosive. This is a major concern, not only to the administrators and staff of the juvenile correctional facilities, but to the community at large (Miller, Mathias, De Muro and Allinson, 1984).

At the present time, juvenile correctional facilities housing males are overcrowded with no end of new arrivals in sight. Many of these youths are in the system at an early age, and as many as 70 percent of those in juvenile facilities will be incarcerated in adult facilities by the age of 18 (Miller et al, 1984). Clearly something must be done to break the cycle of recidivism and to reduce the incidence of violence and problem behavior, both in and out of the institution.

Within the past ten years, the fine arts have begun to flourish in correctional facilities (Szekely, 1982). While there is no hard evidence showing a correlation between a decrease in problem behavior and involvement in an arts program, Project CULTURE (Creative Use of Leisure Time Under Restrictive Environments) reports a 54 to 100 percent drop in incidents among those who participated in an art program in an adult institution. By offering creative outlets for pent-up energies, conflicts

eased and tensions were reduced among residents as well as between residents and guards (Szekely, 1982).

Creative art therapy is designed to provide a therapeutic atmosphere for understanding and change. This paper focuses on specific creative art techniques used successfully by the authors in counseling sessions with incarcerated male juveniles exhibiting typical problem behavior.

Creative Art Techniques

The following creative art techniques were chosen for this population primarily because they are non-threatening, easily accepted and understood, do not require artistic talent, and are often fun.

Collage

Materials: magazines, newspapers, comics; a large sheet of plain paper; scissors are optional; tape or glue to keep pictures in place.

Use: individual, group and family members to elicit feelings and emotions.

Procedure: Present to the counselee a large selection of magazines and other materials. Next, ask the counselee to select a magazine or newspaper. The instructions are: "Go through the magazines and other materials, and look for pictures that best express what you are feeling right now." The counselor encourages the counselee to take any picture that attracts his attention. These pictures represent fragments of the entire collage. What catches the counselee's eye is related to the

issue at hand, but often is not understood until the collage is complete. As the counselee works through segments, the Gestalt is formed. When all of the pictures are gathered, the counselee will "feel" finished. Then the counselee can be asked to arrange the pictures in any order and tape or paste them in place. The counselee is now ready to explain the collage, picture by picture. The relationship of one picture to the next will fall into place.

The collage is an effective technique identifying repressed feelings. It requires no artistic talent, is usually non-threatening, and can be a pleasant, fun exercise.

Cartooning

Materials: a large sheet of paper; some pencils or colored felt-tip markers.

Use: individual, groups, and family sessions. This is a particularly good technique for individual sessions. It is an effective method for problem solving, and for increasing understanding of emotions or feelings. It is very effective for anger work and has been used successfully with suicidal boys.

Procedure: First, identify the area of work. Next, fold a large sheet of paper into several boxes. Each box will be a segment of the cartoon story (just like the comics). Then ask the counselee to select a marker and select a marker for yourself. The action starts in the first box on the paper. Either counselor or counselee can start the drawing. Stick figures are used to represent people. The cartooning can be

continued for as long as feelings are being expressed or until an "Aha" response is obtained.

The cartoon technique has the effect of two chair/empty chair and role-playing work, with the action taking place on paper. This has several advantages. First, because everything is written, the counselee can look at it over and over again. The technique is visual and can be reviewed. Second, the dialogue takes form and can be reviewed, strong answers and comments can be pointed out for reinforcement. Third, when realization takes place, the "Aha" experience is visible, right in front of the counselee's eyes. It is hard to deny what is in one's own handwriting. Fourth, the act of drawing itself is a release of feelings. The counselee has control over the pen and can write whatever he feels like. Fifth, the counselor does not become involved, because the counselee is talking to significant others or emotions through and on the paper, and the paper is neutral.

Cartooning is also effective in dealing with areas that the counselee may be avoiding. The counselor may want to start a dialogue focusing on the problem area without directing the counselee. The counselor opens the door in the first segment; where the dialogue goes from there is up to the counselee. The counselor then follows the counselee's lead. Roles can also be reversed in the cartoon, allowing the counselee to be the counselor. The counselor serves as a mirror to the counselee and allows the counselee to solve his own problem.

This technique, like collage, requires no artistic talent, is generally non-threatening, and has often resulted in the counselee feeling stronger and more powerful.

Family Drawing

With this technique, each member of the family is asked to complete two drawings.

Drawing #1: How the family is now.

Drawing #2: How they would like the family to be.

Materials: paper and pencils, or felt markers.

Use: individual and family sessions.

Procedure: First hand out materials to the individual, or in family sessions, to each family member. Then, ask participant(s) to draw the family (all members) in the household, including themselves, as it is now. When they have finished, ask that the drawing be marked #1 on the reverse side.

Next, ask participant(s) to draw the family as they would like it to be and label this drawing #2. Then have the family member(s) interpret their drawings. The discussion involves feelings about the family as it is now. A comparison is then made to drawing #2, focusing on the differences in the drawings. Questions to investigate include how realistic is drawing #2? When will drawing #2 be true? And what must be done to make it true? What changes are needed, etc.?

When used in family sessions, this technique can be very powerful. Each family member works on their own drawing without contact or responses from the other family members. When

everyone finishes his/her drawings and begins to share, they are amazed to find out how closely their drawings resemble everyone else's in the family. Everyone sees the same problems. They are even more surprised to find out that they all want the same kind of family relationship.

Verbal comments include statements such as: "I never thought you felt that way," "I can't believe we actually agree," or "I thought I was the only one who felt that way." They hear each other through their drawings.

Draw The Family (Doing Something)

Materials: paper, pencils, or felt markers.

Use: individual or family sessions.

Procedure: Ask the individual or each family member to draw the family "doing something". This is the only instruction and allows the drawing to be more non-directed. All of the family members may be represented doing something together or separately. Then have the individual(s) interpret their drawing(s), focusing on the family's relationship and dynamics according to the picture(s) produced.

Incarcerated juveniles and their families are not usually a cohesive group. The family members in their drawings are usually depicted engaging in separate activities. This exercise is very effective in identifying the separateness that exists in the family structure.

Family Sociogram

Materials: paper, pencils, or felt markers.

Use: individual or family session to investigate family constellation, to identify support systems and/or focus on family relationships and communication patterns.

Procedure: Begin with a typical sociogram, except use figures, symbols or colors to represent people in the family. Then have individual(s) interpret their drawing(s) focusing on where all significant others are placed in relationship to individual or family member(s) doing the drawing.

Like drawing the family doing something, this technique is excellent for focusing on family communication and relationships.

Feelings Inside and Out Drawing

Materials: paper and colored felt markers.

Use: individual, group and family sessions to bring inside feelings to the surface and realize how they are camouflaged by outside behavior.

Procedure: First fold the paper in half, greeting-card style. Then on the outside cover, the counselee draws himself as he thinks others see him (what he projects to the world). On the inside of the folded paper, he then draws what he feels inside of himself (his true feelings). The counselee then interprets the drawings.

This technique is particularly effective for challenging thoughts and feelings. The discussion focuses on how to bring true feelings out in the open.

Anger Release Drawing

Materials: paper, preferably large sheets; felt markers, and pastel charcoal.

Use: individual or group sessions. This technique is used for safe release of feelings of anger and frustration.

Procedure: A large sheet of paper is advisable to allow the counselee to make the large strokes and free-swinging gestures, which help to release angry feelings. Have the counselee choose some colors, then ask him to draw an object, rule or law he is angry with. When the drawing is finished, encourage the counselee to deface the drawings with such things as scars, moustaches, beards, warts, hairy moles, stringy hair, missing teeth, etc. Encourage the counselee to talk as he works, telling the figure on paper what he is doing and why. "This is what your beady eyes look like to me!" "You have a big fat nose, because you are always sticking it in my life." When the counselee has finished defacing the drawing, have him wad the paper up and throw it at the wall as many times as he feels is necessary to continue anger release. The drawing may also be torn up and/or stamped on several times to finish the process.

Past-Present-Future Drawing

Materials: paper and felt markers.

Use: individual or group sessions, to identify counselee progress.

Procedure: First, fold the paper into 3 parts. Part I is where the person was and how he was feeling when he was getting into trouble, when he was arrested, or when he arrived at the

institution(the past). Part 2 depicts where he feels he is now (the present). Part 3 is where he would like to be, and how he would like to feel (the future). Ask the counselee to interpret the three stages of the drawing and explain what each section means.

The discussion focuses on how realistic Part 3 is, and what needs to change to make Part 3 possible. This technique is particularly effective for self-evaluation, goal setting, and establishing individual growth in a positive direction.

Discussion

There are some factors the counselor must consider prior to using creative art therapy with incarcerated male juveniles. It is important to remember that members of this population, because of life experiences, may feel threatened and intimidated and therefor resist anything or anyone new and challenging. Building trust can be a long and difficult process.

Time is also a factor to be considered when working with this population. Minimum length of stay at the institution may be relatively short, usually three to nine months, depending on the offense and how long it takes for the resident to change his behavior and attitude.

Due to the nature of correctional institutions and some of their residents, security precautions must be closely observed. Special attention must be paid to the supplies and materials that are used in the creative art therapy. All substances, such as paint, glue, markers, etc. must be nontoxic to avoid sniffing

fumes. Oil paint, for instance, can not be used because it is turpentine-based. Scissors or any other sharp implement, rope, cord, ceramic tools, etc., that could be used as a weapon, require careful supervision.

Creative art therapy techniques, because they deal directly with emotion, are invaluable tools in counseling the incarcerated male juvenile. The counselor can select techniques that elicit the "Aha" experience -- the insightful realization "Aha, this is what I have been doing to myself . . ." (Fagen and Sheperd, 1970). Many of these techniques can be taught to counselees, giving the boys coping skills they can use after release.

One of the most valuable aspects of creative art therapy is its flexibility. The fluidness of creative art therapy enhances counseling sessions in different settings. With this particular diverse population, the incarcerated male juvenile, it can be an invaluable tool.

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